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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the level of black participation in the Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA) to discover means of increasing and improving black student involvement in forensic activities. Of 64 schools reporting that they compete in CEDA, only 22 reported having black debaters on the team. Additionally, these schools reported a total of only 40 black debaters, of whom 22 were novice, 10 junior varsity, and only 8 varsity. Even more telling, only nine schools reported that their black debaters won speaker awards and only two schools stated that their black debaters frequently reached the elimination rounds of large tournaments. Furthermore, only three blacks were scholarship recipients. Findings suggest that the most notable barriers to black participation in debating events include the perception that involvement requires "selling out" to the white community, the fact that entry level opportunities are located predominantly in white areas, the time commitment which makes it impossible for nationally competitive debaters to hold a job, and the fact that public speaking in the black community is channeled toward the religious community. Finally, increased participation can be achieved by getting more black assistant coaches and directors to disseminate information to black students, by bringing in the African-American community through differentiated topic selection, by earmarking more scholarships for black debaters, by working more closely with the United Negro College Fund, or by setting up a debate league for historically black colleges. (KEH)

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BLACK PARTICIPATION IN INTERCOLLEGIATE DEBATE
A quantification and analysis

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Black Participation in CEDA Debate
a quantification and analysis

> Harold Hodgkinson [Senior Fellow, Inst. for Educational Leadership] has succinct advice for anyone planning for the future in higher education: "Learn to read the present more carefully than you used to".
>
> Kelley Fead
>
> Black Issues in Higher Education May 25, 1989

We in CEDA are not reading the present very well. If we do not come to terms with the ethnic homogeneity of the activity--and work to change it--then the CEDA will no longer serve the needs of either our students or of society. CEDA debate is, by and large, a white male activity. While women have made significant in-roads into debate[1], the same cannot be said for other groups. This homogeneity does not represent societal trends, as Professor Hodgkins notes, "by 2000, most Americans will be descended from non-Europeans"(in Fead 1989 20). Specifically, "...82 percent--of the 20 million new workers in the market between now and 2000 will be 'a combination of female, nonwhite and immigrant'"(Fead 1989 20). To fully prepare tomorrow's leaders, teachers and work force, CEDA must take steps to ensure that the values and practices learned in debate are applicable to tomorrow's "real world"--a world made up of diverse

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[1] See Logue 1987. In her work Brenda Logue looks at black participation in CEDA, unfortunately her research is limited to a few tournaments in the Northeast/Ohio region.

cultures.

To anyone who has attended a CEDA tournament, it should be clear that there is little--often no--minority participation. The research presented here adds quantification to that observation. There are some crucial problems with my survey data--the response was limited, I did not examine non-CEDA forensics activities (notably IE, ADA, NDT and Lincoln-Douglas[2]) and I did not explore other non-white male groups (women, Hispanics, Asian-Americans, Native Americans). Some could then respond that my numbers (and subsequent analysis) are meaningless. Clearly further study needs to be done--I think that those further studies will support the conclusions presented here.

This study has four explicit goals: to discover the level of black participation in CEDA; to discover the competitive level of that participation; to discover if these levels are "a problem"; and if they are a problem, what can/should be done to increase black participation in CEDA.

Of 64 schools reporting that they compete in CEDA, 22 reported having black debaters on the team (only one historically black college, Southern University in Louisiana, responded; notably missing are Howard University and Moorehouse College). Most of the schools reproted having between one and three black

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[2] Many respondents indicated that Afro-American students competed on the school's individual events squad; the reason for this higher level of participation in IE (if it exists), as well as the implications of that participation, needs to be explored.

debaters. One school responded that a black member of their team "usually does IEs, but debates from time to time" (survey). These 22 schools had a total of 40 black debaters; if Southern U. is excluded (15 black debaters) those numbers go to 21/25--or 63/25. The 64 schools responding reported having a total of 692 debaters (63/677, excluding Southern U). Not encouraging numbers. Further, of the 40 black debaters, 22 are novice, 10 junior varsity and only eight varsity (for predominantly white institutions those numbers go to 13, 8 and four). Even more telling, only two schools reported that their black debaters were "often in the elimination rounds of large tournaments"--seven schools responded "sometimes" and 10 "rarely/never". The numbers are slightly more balanced with speaker awards; nine schools report that their black debaters win speaker awards "often", eight "sometimes" and only two "rarely/never". Even with a few blacks excelling at debate, of the 37 schools that reported to offer debate scholarships only three blacks were recipients of those scholarships--and these include debaters at Southern University. Many directors of forensics expressed concern over the lack of black participation--yet only nine reported making special efforts to increase the ethnic and racial diversity of their teams. In short, 63 predominantly white institutions of higher education report having 675 debaters, 25 of whom are black; of those 25 debaters, only two are often involved in elimination rounds of large tournaments. Only one respondent

reported having a black coach (William Baker of Columbia University). There is no reason to believe that these numbers are not representative of the CEDA community at large. Is this low level of participation a problem?

Yes. The educational experience of both African-American and white debaters is hurt. Don Wilson, an African-American debater at Transilvania State University echoes many when he writes, "[low black participation] deprives African-American students of a chance to express themselves, learn how to think logically and prepare for a career"(survey). Essentially, that anyone does not compete is bad. The importance of African-American participation gets magnified when one looks to America's educational future. By the year 2000 European-American males will be a minority in this country. Unfortunately, the expansion of non-Europeans in the population is not being mirrored by their appearance at college and university graduations. Our institutions of higher education are not luring minority students, and not keep those students who do attend. To combat this Dr. Reginald Wilson has outlined seven "principles of good practice for instructors" who wish to keep minority enrollment high. Of these, five are met especially well by debate. Dr. Wilson notes that: students should be encouraged to work together; "actively learn"; get prompt feedback on their progress; be aware that have high expectations of them exist; and high levels of faculty contact (Black Issues in Higher Education 1990 6). Most debaters must work with a partner (and larger

squad), thus meeting the first suggestion. Since most debate education happens in rounds, debaters spend much of their time actively learning. The existence of the ballot guarantees prompt feedback. The competitive nature of the activity fosters high expectations (though this can be moderated by the coach). Finally, the nature of coaching and judging ensure very high levels of faculty contact. Obviously, these are benefits realized by all our students.

The problems of low black participation in CEDA become greater if one looks to the white community. Kevin D. Amey, an African-American debater at the California State University at Fresno points out that, "since many Blacks do not engage in this activity, contributions [that] advance the study of debate are lost. Cultural diversity is lost..."(survey). This lack of cultural diversity means that issues are not explored completely, and that, "social topics are poorly represented by whites on 'black' topics..."(Townsel, survey). Essentially, a small group of whites are arguing about policies and values that directly impact a culture that is either ignored or misrepresented. This problem is not unique to CEDA, of course. There is a general lack of examination of non-white issues in higher education (Penn State 1987 25). In essence, our white debaters, having learned the issues and rules of logic in a white activity, may emerge into a world where those values and rules simply do not apply.

In responding to the question, "do you think that low black

participation in intercollegiate debate is a cause for concern? Why/not?", William Baker (African-American debate coach at Columbia University, and former nationally competitive CEDA debater at Cornell University) writes:

> Yes. It is a venue for communication and the choice of topics should reflect relevant issues in society. If the issues chosen communicate the unimportance of the black person in this community, what does that say about the relevance of the black experience on the macro level? One of the obvious cases on the fall 1990 topic [censorship of public artistic expression] is Rap music and the plight of Ice-T and 2 Live Crew. Affirmative teams will discuss free speech, the value of rap and even possibly the racism underlying the censorship acts. Teams may debate children's rights or the need for music as a vent for frustration! I guarantee that no one will be discussing the economic impacts of a boycott by the African American community or the strength of its nationwide potential coalition! Isn't it ironic that such a well-researched community can as a base assumption dismiss millions of voters and $40 billion in buying power? No it's not ironic, it's a tragic reality of a powerful myth of impotence self-perpetuated by an apathetic African-American community and an arrogant caucasian mind-set (survey).
>
> If we are to educate all of our students to the best of our

abilities, then the lack of cultural diversity in CEDA clearly is a problem--one we ignore at our own peril.

Given that very low levels of black participation in CEDA is a problem, the only remaining issue is how do we change it? Two issues need to be addressed here; first, the existence of barriers to participation, and second specific steps that can be taken.

While only one respondent indicated that "subtle remarks [were] made by judges during oral critiques and written decisions"(survey), all indicated attitudinal barriers. Baker sums up the position by writing, "The perception that involvement requires 'selling out' to the white community rather than dissemination of 'our' ideas among peers and professors is the primary [barrier]"(survey). Others have expressed a natural aversion to any subjective judgements by whites, as well as a general lack of awareness of debate in the African-American community. Certainly the "whiteness" of the community serves as a disincentive to participation on all of these levels--as Amey writes, there is a "fear of public speaking in general and specifically with whites"(survey). Bismarck Myrick notes the catch 22 that is set up, "the best way to get more black people to debate is to get more black people to debate"(interview). A further barrier may come in the entry level: the high-schools that tend to excel at debate tend to be in predominantly white areas, thus few African-Americans get experience at the high-

school level. Additionally, the time commitment involved often makes it impossible to hold a job and be a nationally competitive debater; to the extent that many black students need to pay for all or part of their education themselves, this diminishes the number of potential participants in debate[3]. Finally, it is suggested that, "expression in the [African American] community isn't suppressed, but is channeled toward other activities. Most Black public speakers are channelled toward the religious community and don't try to compete in intercollegiate debate"(survey). It becomes clear that while there are no "overt" barriers, the subtle barriers are numerous.

What then can be done? The primary action that needs to be taken is information. We need to combat this "general lack of awareness"(survey). If non-white students don't know about debate, and the benefits potentially reaped from participation in the activity, then we will never increase black participation in the activity. Directors of forensics need to make special appeals to potential pools of African-American debaters--black fraternities and student unions on campus. Many Directors of Forensics said that they take anyone, regardless or race, gender, etc. By the same token, they seek out no one group over another. This attitude seems to make sense, but needs to change, as Kuh and MacKay note:

What is clear, however, is that mere tolerance of diversity

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[3] Certainly many whites do as well, but the existence of an outside job diminishes the size of an already small pool.

> is an unacceptable institutional response to the growing numbers of students of color appearing on predominantly white college campuses. Institutional commitment to promoting a genuine pluralistic learning community is not only desireable, but necessary (1989 54).

If one is attempting to raise money from alumni, one does not appeal to all alumni equally--some are sought out with more vigor than others. Such must be the case with our participants.

One key to increased participation "is getting more black coaches"(Myrick). A study conducted at Penn State University reported that, "Non-white students tend to seek the advice of minority advisers, counselors, or faculty members for help in solving academic and career problems"(14 1987). The study goes on to report, "Students often feel more comfortable discussing personal, academic, and nonacademic issues with non-White faculty, staff, and administrators"(1987 15). A coach is far more than a 'guider of arguments', she or he also serves as an advisor and mentor; if African-Americas look to African-Americans for guidance, and none are in the debate office, that student is likely to go elsewhere. Here there is something of a catch-22; most coaches are former debaters, so to get more black coaches, we need more black debaters and to get more black debaters, we need more black coaches. To break this cycle, we must not only encourage blacks to debate, but also to go onto graduate programs and become assistant coaches and directors.

Further, all of the respondents said that scholarships ought to be ear-marked for black debaters. If a barrier to participation is funding, then we need ensure that funding is provided for participation.

Many also suggested that debate ought to bring in the African-American community by addressing here to fore ignored issues--hold on-campus forums, select national topics that focus on the African-American community and work with debaters to help them see the impacts of resolutions on non-white communities. There is a general recognition that African-American issues are ignored by the community at large. If CEDA does not address issues that the majority of African-American debaters consider important, there is no incentive for African-Americans to debate. On campus, debate teams have special opportunities (through campus forums) foster greater understanding of those issues.

On a more comprehensive level it is suggested that CEDA work with United Negro College Fund (UNCF) schools to encourage participation in the activity--possibly through an ambassador program. CEDA could, for one year, fund (in conjunction with the host school) such an ambassador. An outstanding African-American debater would be tasked with establishing a debate team on that host campus. There is no reason why that person needs to be a graduate--a mature undergraduate could do the same thing. Similarly, schools with debate programs that are close to historically black colleges (HBC) without debate teams, could encourage an assistant coach (or debater) to coach work with that

HBC.

It has also been suggested that historically black colleges set up a debate league, similar to the HBC football league (Myrick). While a "HBCCEDA" would foster separatism, it would at least be increasing involvement. Those who do participate might then go on to help non-HBC schools (thus increasing the coaching pool). There would also be spill-over; there is no reason why a member of HBCCEDA would not attend a non-HBC tournament--thus increasing the number of blacks competing, thus increasing the number of blacks competing. On a less-adventuresome scale, CEDA schools could offer financial help (waiving fees to new programs at HBCs, offering scholarships to outstanding African-American debaters on a needs-basis). At the least, we should encourage historically black colleges to join CEDA (Baker, survey and personal interview).

These steps will not "solve" the problem. But they will help. When asked what a white teacher can do to combat racism, a black university official responded, "find a teachable moment, and teach". CEDA is an on-going teachable moment. As teachers, coaches and directors we must seize this moment--lest our teachable moments slip into irrelevance.

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